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DRAFTED BY EA/VLC:EFMCWILLIAMS, JR.
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EA/VLC:CDLYNE
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TAGS: SHUM, PEPR, LA

SUBJECT: REPORTED USE OF "POISON GAS" AGAINST HMONG HILL TRIBES IN LAOS

1. HMONG HILL TRIBESPEOPLE FLEEING LAOS CONTINUE TO REPORT THAT HMONG CIVILIANS AND COMBATANTS ARE BEING SUBJECTED TO CHEMICAL ATTACKS BY VIETNAMESE/LAO FORCES. REPORTS OF THESE ATTACKS RANGE FROM 1976 TO AS RECENTLY AS MAY 1979.

2. IN JUNE, TWO FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS INTERVIEWED HMONG REFUGEES IN NONG KHAI AND BAN VI NAY REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND. IN A FIVE DAY PERIOD, THE FSO'S DEBRIEFED OVER 20 HMONG WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN EYE WITNESSES TO "POISON GAS" ATTACKS.

3. A SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF THE REPORTS FOLLOWS:

ALL OF THE ATTACK REPORTS RECEIVED TOLD OF AIR DELIVERY OF A SOMETIMES LETHAL, CHEMICAL AGENT (OR AGENTS). REPORTS TENDED TO VARY AS TO COLOR AND THE SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESSES CAUSED BY THE AGENT. TWO ALLEGED SAMPLES OF THE CHEMICAL AGENT RESIDUE COLLECTED AT 1978 AND 1979 ATTACK SITES WERE PROVIDED BY HMONG REFUGEES FOR ANALYSIS, BUT BECAUSE OF SMALL SAMPLE SIZE AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME, THIS ANALYSIS

HAS NOT LED TO IDENTIFICATION OF THE AGENT. SEVERAL REPORTS TOLD OF REPEATED CHEMICAL ATTACKS ON HMONG VILLAGES THAT WERE ESTABLISHED BY AND UNDER THE CONTROL

OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, REPORTS OF HARSH CONDITIONS IMPOSED ON HONG LIVING UNDER LAO GOVERNMENT CONTROL RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT A BROADER SCALE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REFUGEE REPORTS TOGETHER WITH INTELLIGENCE REPORTS LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SOME AIR-DELIVERED CHEMICAL AGENT (OR AGENTS) HAS BEEN AND IS BEING USED BY VIETNAMESE AND LAO FORCES AGAINST HMONG HILLTRIBES PEOPLE IN LAOS. THERE APPEARS TO BE REASON

TO BELIEVE THAT THE AGENT(S) IS SOMETIMES LETHAL AND THAT IT IS BEING EMPLOYED WIDELY AGAINST HMONG COMBATANTS AND NON-COMBATANTS ALIKE.

IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE LAO COULD BE CARRYING OUT THIS CAMPAIGN WITHOUT FAIRLY SOPHISTICATED FOREIGN TECHNICAL SUPPORT. REPORTS SUGGEST INTIMATE VIETNAMESE INVOLVEMENT.

4. DEPARTMENT IS FORWARDING UNCLASSIFED REPORTS DERIVED FROM INTERVIEWS ALONG WITH SEVERAL UNSOLICITED DEPOSIT-ONS AND A BRIEF INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND. POSTS SHOULD SHARE INFORMATION WITH HOST GOVERNMENTS NOTING U.S. CONCERN ABOUT CONTINUING REPORTS OF GAS USAGE AND ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE HMONG IN LAOS NOW BEING RESETTLED FROM THEIR HIGHLAND HOMES, APPARENTLY BY FORCE IN SOME AREAS.

5. ACTION POSTS SHOULD REQUEST ANY INFORMATION HOST GOVERNMENTS MAY HAVE WITH REGARDS TO CHARGES OF USE OF LETHAL CHEMICAL AGENTS IN SUPPRESSION DRIVES AGAINST THE HMONG IN LAOS. THEY MAYNOTETHAT THE U.S. IS INTERESTED IN PURSUING THE INVESTIGATION.

6. THE DEPARTMENT WILL BE DISCUSSING CLASSIFIED INFORMATION RELATED TO THE USE OF CHEMICAL AGENTS AGAINST THE HMONG IN LAOS WITH EMBASSIES OF ACTION ADDRESSEES HERE.
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7. IF POL POT'S CLAIMS THAT POISON GAS HAS BEEN USED BY THE VIETNAMESE IN KAMPUCHEA ARE BROUGHT UP, YOU SHOULD NOTE THAT ALTHOUGH WE ARE AWARE OF THESE CHARGES, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE AS YET TO SUPPORT THEM. WE WOULD WELCOME ANY INFORMATION ON THIS MATTER AS WELL.
VANCE

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